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SUBJECT: UAEG AGREES TO IMPLEMENT FULBRIGHT PROGRAM

¶1. (U) Summary: On June 24, Ambassador, PAO and Econoff met with Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al-Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, to discuss implementing a Fulbright Visiting Student Program in the UAE. Sheikh Nahyan was enthusiastic about the program and agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing a bilateral Fulbright Council. Ambassador asked the Minister to name two Emiratis to the bilateral Council and informed him that she would appoint two Americans to the Council. In addition to the Fulbright program, Ambassador asked Sheikh Nahyan about educational reform at the university level. He replied that the federal budget for higher education remained too low. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On June 24, Ambassador, PAO and Econoff met with Sheikh Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education, to discuss implementation of a Fulbright Visiting Student Program, with funding for five UAE graduate students to study in the United States. Ambassador proposed implementing this program through a bilateral Fulbright Council via a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Higher Education. The Bilateral Council will identify fields of study for the Fulbright grants and will interview prospective candidates for the program. The Council will be comprised of two Americans and two Emiratis. Ambassador proposed signing the MOU and inaugurating the program by early September; Sheikh Nahyan said he was eager to sign the MOU as soon as it was ready.

¶3. (SBU) In addition to their discussions on the Fulbright program, Ambassador also asked Sheikh Nahyan about post-secondary education reform. The Minister seemed optimistic about the state of education reform in the UAE, although he complained about the federal budget. Sheikh Nahyan reported that while there are 20,000 applicants for the 2006-2007 academic year at Zayed University, UAE University and the Higher Colleges of Technology (equivalent to community colleges) combined, there are only 7,000 slots available due to lack of funding. (Comment. Although funding is a problem at the post secondary level, funding is an even greater problem at the primary and secondary levels. The wealthy emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai supplement federal education funding with their own rulers, funds. End comment.)

¶4. (U) Ambassador also asked the Minister about the state of students' preparedness to enter UAE universities. The Minister said that using the CEPA English language entrance exam (which tests English skills) as an admission requirement will ensure that students are better prepared to enter university.  
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